



APRIL 2021

As we continue our fight against COVID-19, it's now time for all employees to be vaccinated against this deadly virus. We first mandated the vaccine for our newly hired employees and for executives and managers who are now 100% compliant. Now it is your turn. Already 84% of you have received your vaccination, and I am grateful for your decision to do this to protect our patients. Those of you who have not been vaccinated yet have until June 7. Please see the [HR policy](#) that outlines the consequences of not being compliant by June 7, which include suspension and eventually termination.

Mandating the vaccine was not a decision we made lightly. The process was reminiscent of how we made the decision to become one of the first in the country to mandate the flu vaccine in 2009. Because science has proven that the COVID-19 vaccines are not only safe, but extremely effective, it became an easier decision to make. The FDA's recent decision to pause the administration of the Johnson & Johnson vaccine proves how carefully the vaccines are being monitored. Like we do, the FDA takes patient safety very seriously and paused the J&J vaccine after six people, out of 6.8 million doses, reported severe side effects. We primarily administer the Pfizer vaccine, which uses mRNA technology, which has now been used safely in well over 100 million individuals in the U.S. alone.

Now we must do our part to keep patients and ourselves safe. And please know, we would never ask you to do anything that we thought was unsafe.

Since we announced publicly that we were making the vaccine mandatory we have received both kudos and skepticism—but we're leading the way. Now CEOs of other health care institutions are calling nearly every day to ask how we are doing it. It takes courage to be first, and to make the tough decisions for the right reasons. I sincerely hope you all make the right decision and decide to get vaccinated if you haven't already. To help you with any remaining questions, please see [this FAQ](#) and plan to join a panel of Houston Methodist experts on a town hall tomorrow (Friday) from noon-1 p.m. Access the town hall by visiting [this link](#).

If you are interested, below is an editorial I shared with a few media outlets recently about the importance of all health care workers being vaccinated. It further explains why we made



the decision to make the vaccine mandatory. As always, please share any feedback you have with me by using the "feedback" button below.

On March 31, Houston Methodist became the first major health care system in the U.S. to require mandatory COVID-19 vaccinations. We started with managers and new hires, and all employees (26,000 of them) and employed physicians will be close behind. Since the first vaccine was approved, more than 195 million doses have been administered safely in the U.S. alone. With supplies of the vaccine more abundant, it's now time that all health care systems follow our example and begin requiring employees to be vaccinated. This will send a strong message that we're doing everything possible to keep patients safe. We'd also be role models for those who may be hesitating to get a vaccine.

As health care workers we've taken a sacred oath to do everything possible to keep our patients safe and healthy – this includes getting vaccinated. This isn't the first time our industry has stepped up and made vaccines mandatory. Not long ago, flu vaccines were voluntary for health care workers. Today, 17 states require flu vaccines for health care workers. The numbers clearly show we should treat COVID-19 far more seriously than the flu. According to the CDC, the flu has accounted for between 12,000 to 61,000 deaths a year since 2010 in the U.S. The CDC also reports that the last two major flu outbreaks in 1957 and 1968 accounted for 116,000 and 100,000 deaths in the U.S. respectively. If we mandate flu vaccines for these numbers, we should also mandate COVID-19 vaccines given how much more deadly it is.

Frontline workers have battled courageously against COVID-19 working long hours to keep patients alive. They've done so at risk to their own health regardless of the many precautions we take to keep them safe. Behind the scenes, researchers and physicians have worked tirelessly to find new treatments and cures to keep those who do contract the disease from its worst outcomes – including death. While we've made tremendous strides, our best shot at defeating it continues to be vaccinating enough Americans to create herd immunity.

Houston Methodist began vaccinating employees on Dec. 11, 2020. Today, more than 84% of our staff is vaccinated. Already we're seeing positive results as the number of employee infections has dropped inversely with the number of employees receiving the vaccine. It appears we've successfully created herd immunity at Houston Methodist.

Creating herd immunity is perhaps more important than ever before the virus mutates into something that sets us further back. Already we've seen different variants that are proving to be more formidable than the original strain. The more time we give this virus to spread, is the more time we give it to mutate. The U.K. variant has proven to be more contagious than its predecessor. A genome

sequencing team at Houston Methodist estimates it's now the prevalent variant in the region.

The numbers of those contracting the disease and dying from it both continue to grow. Already more than 564,000 Americans have died as a result of the virus. This number does not include those who have lost their life indirectly as a result of this virus. Last year, hospitals around the country learned that thousands of patients ignored serious health warnings and chose not to go to hospitals or EDs fearing they'd catch COVID-19. They preferred to stay home and deal with the consequences than risk catching the virus. Let's give patients the peace of mind they deserve knowing that our hospitals are safe from COVID-19.

Requiring mandatory vaccinations isn't just about safety. It's also about being examples for those who are hesitant to get vaccinated. Leaders at all levels have championed the vaccine and are doing everything to educate those reluctant to receive the vaccine. By mandating vaccines health care institutions will show the world that we trust the safety and efficacy of the vaccine, hopefully setting an example that other others will follow.

Most health care workers will agree that the path toward any sort of return to "normal" must be firmly centered on vaccinating as many Americans as possible to create herd immunity. Not only must we help get us there by administering the vaccine, but also by setting an example for others to follow. I hope other health care systems and employers will quickly join Houston Methodist in making the vaccine mandatory for staff. The sooner we're able to end this pandemic, the fewer lives we will continue to lose to it and the closer we can get to normal.

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FEEDBACK